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# Marsh Lake expansion could bring swimming, boating events to Fairfield

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**FAIRFIELD** — Marsh Park's transformation into a 170-acre crown jewel in the city's park system could lead to partnerships with other county organizations, such as the Butler County Visitors Bureau and Butler County MetroParks.

The end goal is for Marsh Park to become an L-shaped park with two lakes. Its current half-mile walking path will also be extended to 3.1 miles and connect with the area commonly referenced as Black Bottom, a 30-acre undeveloped park along the Great Miami River.

Mark Hecquet, Butler County Visitor Bureau executive director, said he met with city officials several years ago about Marsh Park, and has continued those conversations "about what can it be beyond a great asset for the residents of Fairfield."

"What's certainly exciting for us is that Fairfield sees that it can be more than a park with a big lake," he said.

While swimming and boating entertainment events are ways to attract visitors to the city, Hecquet said, "It's not all about events. It will be an attraction, as well."

"It's really a product we generally don't have in our county, which is really exciting," he said.

The current lake is, at its deepest points, around 80 feet deep, and the lake in the undeveloped area is around 30 feet at its deepest point.

"The Marsh Park expansion is a very interesting concept," said Kelly Barkley, spokeswoman for the county MetroParks. "We're certainly willing to have those dialogues (about partnerships)."

The parks organization has collaborative relationships with many Butler County communities, including with Middletown, Liberty Twp. and West Chester Twp., and have talked with Fairfield city officials.

The Great Miami Trail, which now ends a mile north of Marsh Park at Water Works Park in the city, will connect through Black Bottom and end at the Hamilton County-Butler County border.

One big issue — actually about a 40,000-ton issue — is a pile of sand that is at least two stories tall and several dozen feet long, said Fairfield City Manager Mark Wendling.

"We still have to figure out how to dispose of that sand," he said. "Some of that can be disposed on-site, but it's an awfully big pile."

The idea to dispose of some of the sand on-site, Wendling said, is to create a berm so the adjacent neighborhood won't be distracted by the daily activities of the park.

Fairfield City Council will hear a presentation tonight about developing the 110 acres that is currently a gravel and sand quarry.

The plan to expand Marsh Park has been an idea for nearly two decades.

A lease agreement was signed in 1956 that when Darvo, a company that eventually became part of Martin Marietta, finished with its gravel mining operations the property would be deeded to the city. City leaders say Martin Marietta is wrapping up its mining operations.

"This was a lot of forethought by the city fathers back in the 1950s," said Wendling. "I think it was mutually beneficial because once you're done (with the mined property), what are you going to do with that?"

Martin Marietta leased the current Marsh Park portion of its property to the city in the mid-1990s, and the park opened on River Road on April 1, 1996.

"It's a tentative date, but the transfer (of land) will happen in late '15 or early '16," Wendling said.

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